

# HilliardGreenInterview with Jazz Improv Magazine

**What recording or recordings initially sparked your interest in jazz, and inspired your desire to perform and or compose?**

What got me into Jazz as far as a 1st recording was during a junior high school music class the teacher played something that she refereed to as Cool Jazz. As soon as I heard it, it sounded cool to me. It was Miles Davis but I don't remember which record. I had already started playing bass and had pretty much decided that I was going to become a professional musician. I thought to myself it would be a good idea for me to learn how to play Jazz and improvise.

**Talk about the relevance of developing a healthy curiosity about ideas and people, in and out of music, to bolster your artistry.**

Music is bigger than we are and it has taken a lot of people to make music great and it will continue to take a lot of people to continue to make this music great. Everyone has something to offer and whenever it comes from a deep place within them, it is special. When I am able to feel what someone has to offer it gives me energy that inspires me.

**Could you discuss the relevance for you as an artist, to approach this music as a road to be traveled, with the opportunity for a lifetime of growth and learning, as opposed to a destination to be reached.**

Music is a spiritual experience and what I am continually trying to do is be able to do something spiritual on a regular basis. The more I do this, the more I am able to see what can be done and it is endless. When I was young and read that a mature person talk, about how much they feel as though they are just getting started, I could not understand what they were talking about let alone comprehend. Now that I am a mature adult, I fully understand to the point that I OVERSTAND!

A few times when I have performed I felt absolute perfection. What was happening was not me doing it but a channel for a super force to realize. That feeling is very humbling. It is a feeling I will want to experience many times and that I would like for people that are listening to feel as well.

**What are some of the challenges you face and expect to face as an artist, as an independent artist, and how do you envision making them work for you?**

Some of the challenges that I feel I have are that there are not enough hours in a day to do what I feel I need to do. With all that it takes to live in NYC as a free-lancer you have to wear many hats to keep yourself employed. That is a challenge. I constantly feel like I am struggling to keep up.

**How have you strived to develop your own voice - in the face of the immense influence of certain overwhelmingly influential artists?**

I think it is easier to develop your own voice when you are among influential artists. The reason I think that is because they will often times tell you what they think, what they do and what they did to be able to do what they do.

I will never forget the following experience for as long as I live: Two major artists I knew were playing across from each other in major club in New York. In public they were complimentary to each other. I was very fortunate to meet each privately during their stint and what they said behind each other's back about the other's approach to the instrument made me say to myself, "OH MY GOD, SO THIS IS WHAT YOU REALLY THINK?" Both are great, great, great artists but very different. What I realized is a majority of their sound and style came from how they think the instrument should be played.

What was even more enlightening to me was when I told them what my artistic aspirations were and how I was reluctant to tell people what they were/are they both disagreed with me and said so explicitly to my face. I grew a lot that day.

**How if at all do the pressures of talent buyers, peers and the marketplace affect your music or creativity?**

About how people in the industry affect my music or creativity, I really don't know. That requires an insight about myself that I don't have.

**Could you talk about some experience that you have had that has helped you become more sensitive to others and has correspondingly contributed to your artistic growth?**

Teaching has made me sensitive and really helped me grow as a player. When I started teaching in a formal setting I called my dad, who was a teacher all of my life, and I said, "Teaching the students the basics over and over helps me get better at doing the basics." He wholeheartedly agreed with my observation.

**If you could magically get your wish in the next three years, what goal-action or event-would you hope to accomplish, and what is the emotional core of that goal (i.e. the driving force: A desire for fame? Wealth? Helping people? Creating? Etc.)**

Musically where I hope to be three years from now is touring as a solo bassist twice a year and with my band, The Jazz Expressions, twice a year. I hope to have all six Bach Cello Suites learned and continue to be freelancing but add some Classical, Tango and more electric bass gigs into the mix.

Healthwise, I want a Kinesthesiologist to be able tell me, "You're not too bad." And when I look down to be able to see my feet over my stomach.

**What is it that you have you observed that inspires audiences about your performances and music?**

I think it is the amount of spirit that can happen with me and the people I am playing with. I am now at an age where I am playing with players that have many years of experience and have the performance abilities to inspire others.

One of the things that I learned from working with entertainers is how to read an audience. Not that I am really good at it but I am very aware of what it is to read an audience. I think one of the things that has made Jazz suffer is certain ways is some performers have no clue of what it is to know how to read an audience and will often times alienate a room full of people before they finish their set.

**We all love to get compliments for what we do well. How do you take responsibility for what doesn't work, and how do you make changes or turn things around. Could you cite an example?**

This is something I wrestle with a lot. It is very nice to have people say nice things about me and to me. They are oftentimes overshadowed by not so nice things that I have read and heard. I do consider the source. I think it is necessary. Not everyone is going to understand or feel what you are doing. When they give a comment and is at a point where they think they are trying to do you a favor. Often I say to myself, "Do you think so and so really understood what they heard?"

For instance, a reviewer of my solo bass CD said that my improvisation was "atonal" and there isn't one atonal passage on the entire disk.

Once I sent a tape to a record producer to interest him in offering me a deal with and he sent me back a response that was so demoralizing that I fell down just where I was as I was reading it. It was like someone had punched me in the stomach. I was not prepared at all. It was so overwhelming at that time that I imagined quitting music. When I was able to talk to him about it later he couldn't even remember what he said.

When I get negative comments I do try to see if what they are saying is valid. Sometimes it is. Then I will decide if it is something I want to do anything about. Sometimes I do something about it and sometimes I don't.

**What are the benefits and drawbacks of being an independent artist?**

The primary benefit of being an independent artist is that I feel my life is what I make it. That may not seem like much but considering that as an African American many people before me that had to endure slavery it means a lot to me. An example is if I am in a job I don't like I can leave it. Because I am somewhat established as an independent I am not too far from another job.

The drawback is every decision I make is mine and when it turns out to be a bad one I have to deal with the consequences.

**Tell us about your activities outside of music and how they have helped you stay balanced, and contribute to your personal and artistic growth?**

One of the things that I am doing that is outside of music is learning a foreign language, Spanish and I must say that is a very slow process for me. It is a continual reminder of what was like for me in the first several years of studying the bass. It took a long time for me before certain things kicked in. The process has many similarities to studying music and when I catch myself really struggling I know not to beat up on myself too much and get depressed. Instead I will just remember what I had to do in order to learn my chords and scales and know that Rome wasn't built in a day.